IRISH BURDENS: HOW NINETEENTH CENTURY POVERTY INSPIRED NATIONALIST WOMEN

A Thesis

Presented to the Honors Program of

Angelo State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for Highest University Honors

BACHELOR OF ARTS

by

CHRISTINE ANITA FOLEY

May 2021

Major: History

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by

CHRISTINE ANITA FOLEY

APPROVED:

Dr. Rebekah McMillan, Chair

Dr. Laurie Dickmeyer

5 May 2021

APPROVED:

Dr. Shirley M. Eoff
Director of the Honors Program

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the support I received from some truly wonderful people. I must first thank Dr. Rebekah McMillan who walked with me through an entire year of research on Irish history. Her knowledge, guidance, and kindness inspire me greatly and made this project extremely rewarding. I feel lucky to have worked with her. I would also like to thank Dr. Laurie Dickmeyer, who also kindly offered support and input on this thesis. Additionally, I must thank Dr. Shirley Eoff for her dedication to my growth as a student and historian. In her role as a professor, editor, and role model, she has shaped my academic career during my four years at Angelo State. My college education would not have been the same without her influence, and for that I am truly thankful.

I am also deeply grateful to my family who has supported me throughout my time in college. They are the most important people in my life who I have always been able to rely on for anything. Special thanks are due to my father, who instilled in me an interest in Irish culture and history throughout my childhood.

I am especially grateful for two specific people who have inspired my love of history more than anyone else. Mrs. Diane de Waal cultivated my passion of history by believing in me throughout my high school education. She is proof that teachers are some of the most influential people a young person will encounter. Finally, Dr. Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai has my forever gratitude for regularly encouraging me to become a history major. Without his belief in my ability to succeed in this field of study, this thesis would surely not be finished today. I thank you all for the roles you have played in bringing this project into fruition.

ABSTRACT

In the year 1900, a woman named Maud Gonne established a group called *Inghinidhe na hEireann* — the Daughters of Erin. This group, made entirely out of women, aspired to bring independence to the Irish nation by advancing cultural and political nationalism in a number of different ways. This thesis investigates how nineteenth century poverty and attempts to mitigate it served as an avenue to bring middle-class women into the nationalist movement. It explores how the three themes of nationalism, poverty, and female political activism interacted with one another to uncover the roots of the Daughters of Erin, who would later help advance Ireland's fight for independence against Great Britain.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In 1900, middle-class Irish women acted upon a desire to cultivate their political convictions through the establishment of an organization called *Inghinidhe na hEireann* — the Daughters of Erin. These women were nationalists who shared a commitment to Ireland's complete independence and sought to develop the group's purpose to reflect this commitment. After establishing St. Brigid as the patron for the Daughters, they pledged themselves to a list of objectives that exemplify Irish nationalism explicitly.[1] These objectives included the re-establishment of the complete independence of Ireland, popularizing Irish manufacturing, embracing the study of the Irish history and art, the study of the Irish language, and mitigating the influence of English culture that was "doing so much injury to the artistic taste and refinement of the Irish people."[2] The organization fostered ideas of nationalism, feminism, and advocacy for the poor through their meetings and activism. With founder and president Maud Gonne (1866-1953) leading this group of women, together, they represented a coalition of the Irish population with great ambitions and unique motivations to take Ireland's nationalist fight into the twentieth century.

The Daughters of Erin are only one example of middle-class female activism in Ireland, and their genesis rests upon an extremely eventful nineteenth century. They embraced Ireland's past as a means of engaging with the future, and nationalist women contributed significantly to the political scope of the Easter Rising, the Irish Civil War, and

[1] Margaret Ward, *Maud Gonne: Ireland's Joan of Arc* (London: Pandora, 1990), 65.

[2] *Ibid.*

the eventual establishment of the Irish Republic, even though narratives of these events are dominated by the experiences of men. Starting prominently in the 1970s, historians and educators have sought to raise the profiles of women in history and tell their stories in academic settings, and recent years have seen a development of literature on women of Irish history.[3] This research seeks to contribute to such scholarship by exploring how poverty in the nineteenth century provided a framework for women to become politically engaged and help contribute to the cause of Irish sovereignty and independence from Great Britain. In establishing a connection between the themes of poverty and nationalism, many existent stories of Irish nationalist women become more understandable and poignant. These stories are available in the form of individual books and articles, but what is yet to be directly explored is how nineteenth century poverty altered women's roles and provided them with the means and inspiration to become nationalist activists. This research will also explore the existing narratives of women who joined the nationalist movement out of concern for the poor, and piece together how poverty and plight were catalysts to transform women into the significant political activists that historians are studying more intently today.

To best understand the depth of the stories of middle-class Irish nationalist women, like the ones in the Daughters of Erin, it is important to explore the roots of female activism throughout Ireland's nineteenth century that preceded their establishment. Ireland had a longstanding relationship of conflict with Great Britain by the early 1800s, and expressions of this conflict in the form of uprisings against British rule were not uncommon. The genesis

[3] Bridget Lockyer and Abigail Tazzymant, "'Victims of History': Challenging Students' Perceptions of Women in History," *Teaching History*, no. 165 (2016): 9, accessed April 2, 2021, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26384214.

of the nineteenth century saw a change in the nature of Irish political conflict and uprisings. Historians often argue that the revolutionary spirit of France and America, as well as Enlightenment ideas that undergirded those revolutions, played a role in influencing the 1798 uprising of the United Irishmen.[4] This was the first of many republican-style uprisings intended to establish legitimacy for Catholics, non-conforming Protestants, and cultural and political independence from Anglican Britain. Though understudied and more scarcely documented, women played important roles in aiding the United Irishmen in their pursuits and shared the same desires as their male counterparts. Additionally, women had special roles and duties in Ireland's Great Famine and Land War, and such roles helped cultivate a political climate that fostered the establishment of a formal nationalist organization like the Daughters of Erin to further advance their ideas. These events also reflected the unique nature of Irish poverty in the nineteenth century, and women were both witnesses and victims to this socio-economic suffering.

Before further exploring the relationship between these themes of nationalism and poverty, it is important to explore their meanings and histories as concepts more thoroughly. The concept of nationalism has waxed and waned throughout time and has manifested in different ways depending on the circumstances surrounding a certain historical period. Similarly, poverty and plight are not experienced homogeneously, and the way it is experienced by people is contingent upon their time and place in history as well. Irish poverty is no different. Before an in-depth exploration of how women fit into these themes in

[4] See for instance, Trevor Parkhill, "The Wild Geese of 1798: Emigrés of the Rebellion," *Seanchas Ardmhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society* 19, no. 2 (2003): 118-135, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25746923.

Irish history, this research aims to first define what nationalism and poverty mean in a general sense, and further explain how these concepts applied specifically to the Irish nation and her people in the nineteenth century and beyond.

While many may struggle to define such a broad ideology as nationalism that has been widely recognized since the end of the Age of Enlightenment, it would be agreeable to say that nationalism pertains to the desire for sovereignty of a nation and concern for its interests – going as far as to elevate such interests over those of other nations. In his academic exegesis on nationalism, political theorist Benedict Anderson proposes that the nation itself is an "imagined political community," noting that members of the nation who take great pride in it will not know most of its members, therefore making nationalism an ideology based on internalized constructs rather than existing realities.[5] In the case of the Irish, Anderson appears correct. Despite the camaraderie and intimacy between many nationalist groups such as the United Irishmen, the Fenian Brotherhood, and the Daughters of Ireland, there was a multitude of political and religious diversity and often great disconnect between members. Ireland's nationalists (including Irish nationalist women) shared a common disdain for Great Britain and desire for independence, but differed in their more specific beliefs about political themes such as socialism, feminism, and even the universality of Catholicism. These differences in opinion are expressed throughout different narratives of nationalist women that this thesis seeks to explore in greater detail. Furthermore, this research was conducted with the understanding of Irish nationalism being a united movement

[5] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, England: Verso, 2016), 6.

in some ways, but divided in others, echoing Anderson's idea about many aspects of a political community within a nation being imagined.

To further understand nationalism through the lens of practice rather than theory, scholars affirm that the idea bears similarities to patriotism, but embodies more exclusivist characteristics. Professor and political scientist Niraja Gopal Jayal argues in her work that in the European tradition, nationalism aspires to ethnic, linguistic, and cultural unity for a nation, while patriotism places more of an emphasis on citizenship, republicanism, and shared memories, and is generally discussed with fewer dark undertones.[6] Additional political theorists, such as John Schaar, have determined nationalism to be patriotism's "blood brother," suggesting that it stains the innocent concept of loving one's nation with extremism and senses of superiority.[7]

In the case of the Irish people, their nationalism is mostly defined by the relationship of conflict and perceived oppression perpetuated by Britain, and this is reflected in political documents associated with their movement. Irish nationalism is certainly more than just positive patriotic sentiments; it is an aggressive ideology that honors experiences specific to Irish culture. This is well captured in the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic. It asserts the following, and captures the raw essence of Irish nationalism simply yet eloquently:

> We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty; six times during the

[6] Niraja Gopal Jayal, "Revisiting Nationalism," *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 42 (2006): 4513.

[7] John H. Schaar, *Legitimacy in the Modern State* (Routledge, 2018), 285-286.

> past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades in arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and of its exaltation among the nations.[8]

This document is nothing short of a byproduct of a developing nationalist tendency in 1800s Ireland. It inspired Irish ownership of both land and destiny, and states that the Irish people are willing to die for the cause of obtaining that ownership. It is an especially important document for women, as it is the first of its kind to declare political equality for them, emphasizing their importance in the movement. This is in spite of the exclusion and discrimination that women encountered within Irish nationalism, which will be explored more in this thesis. Nonetheless, the 1916 Proclamation begins by addressing "Irishmen and Irishwomen," and in the excerpt above the rhetoric embraces past uprisings of the Irish people. With references to previous assertions of sovereignty, the document could be considered an invitation to explore Ireland's history of the pursuit of independence, a history that was enhanced by women. This thesis works under the accepted notion that women were extremely important to Irish nationalism,[9] but seeks to extrapolate why and how they became involved and stayed active, even in the midst of the hardship of discrimination.

Dedicated nationalists like Maud Gonne and the other members of the Daughters embodied a brand of influential nationalism that aspired to overlook other ideological

[8] "Copy of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, 1916," accessed April 27, 2021, https://jstor.org/stable/10.2307/community.29825218.

[9] To explore sources that have established this notion, see *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) by Margaret Ward, and *Irish Nationalist Women: 1900-1918* (London: Pluto Press, 1995) by Senia Pašeta, who argue for the historical legitimacy of these women due to their unique roles and contributions to the general movement for Irish independence.

differences – they were greatly accepting of people with varying political ideas, so long as they were useful to Ireland's independence, showing a commitment to their country above all other measures.[10] The assertive and dedicated nature of women's sentiments in Irish nationalism echo some of the aggressive undertones of Jayal's assessment, as Gonne's nationalism was so ambitious that it was willing to accept minor differences in thought held by others. Nonetheless, it is important to note that within Irish nationalist movements, the diversity of opinions about a multitude of cultural, economic, religious, and political issues facing Ireland, still abounded. Senia Pašeta's book, *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900-1918,* describes how many women had to become "multilingual" in order to justify their ideas as nationalists, but also as feminists and suffragists.[11] Because Irish nationalism and feminism were uniquely intricate creeds with differing agendas, many female activists felt inclined to choose sides, and nationalism's crushing influence often won out.[12] This is echoed in discourse from Constance Markievicz, (1868-1927) a prominent Irish nationalist and the first woman to be elected into the Westminster Parliament. She, in an early speech upon her entry to the nationalist movement, encouraged Irish women to "live truly Irish lives," which meant eating Irish food, wearing Irish clothes, and thinking of yourself as "citizens first and women after."[13] However, other women associated with nationalism, such as Hanna Sheehy-

[10] Ward, *Maud Gonne,* 58.

[11] Senia Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women: 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 14.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] Anne Haverty, *Constance Markievicz: Irish Revolutionary* (London: Pandora, 1988), 82.

Skeffington, (1877-1946) were "above all, a feminist."[14] These women had some common goals, but did not always have their priorities in the same order. This research intends to focus on women more associated with nationalism rather than the suffrage movement and feminism, but it is worth noting that women in both camps often came together for charitable reasons related to serving the poor.[15] This leads to the relevance of the second primary theme of this research — poverty.

Poverty parallels nationalism in that it is a multidimensional phenomenon that varies greatly amongst people, time, and location, and can be explored through a number of different lenses. In more recent years, human geographers have noted that poverty and social inequality have a "geographical dimension."[16] This idea suggests that poverty and its gravity is impacted by the geographical region of those who suffer from it. The specific nature of Irish poverty fits within this understanding of general social inequality. Ireland's close geographical proximity to England made the Crown's rule over the nation easier to execute, and the rural aspect of Ireland's national geography contributed to the dilapidated conditions observed throughout the nation.[17] These observations point to what makes Irish poverty unique — the rural and unindustrialized nature of the nation alongside an oppressive

[14] Liz Curtis, "Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington Remembered," *History Ireland* 4, no. 2 (1996): 9, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27724331.

[15] Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women,* 115.

[16] Paul Milbourne, "The Geographies of Poverty and Welfare," *The Geography Compass* 4(2): 158-171, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2009.00296.x

[17] "Condition of Ireland. Illustrations of the New Poor Law," *The Illustrated London News*, December 22, 1849.

relationship dominated by English rule.[18] This multidimensional experience of poverty undoubtedly served as a catalyst for many women entering Irish nationalism. Maud Gonne and Constance Markievicz are two relevant examples of women who came from wealthy and aristocratic backgrounds who abandoned their roots for the sake of the cause. However, poverty in Ireland's nineteenth century predates both of these women, and this thesis intends to explore its roots.

Early attempts to formally mitigate plight in Ireland have roots in the development of the Irish Poor Law system. This development was a response to increasing pressure for poor relief in Ireland in the 1830s, and women were both beneficiaries and administrators of the ramifications of this system.[19] Because it was thought that women had an "innate concern" for other women and children suffering from poverty, it was not uncommon to see middle-class women organizing to provide charity to these groups.[20] Social activism was by no means the exclusive medium for women's political activity in Ireland's pursuit of independence, but this research will argue that poverty was an avenue to bring many women into Irish nationalism.

For middle-class women, Irish poverty served as something of a stepping stone that inspired further nationalist activism, because it was an acceptable "first step" for women to engage in charitable activity. The long nineteenth century showed that there was much at

[18] T. Jones Hughes explores this concept in "The Origin and Growth of Towns in Ireland," *University Review* 2, no. 7 (1961): 8-15, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25510072.

[19] Virginia Crossman, *Politics, Pauperism and Power in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 8.

[20] *Ibid.,* 185.

stake for a number of marginalized groups in Ireland – such as Catholics, non-Anglican Protestants, tenant farmers, women, and children. These groups underwent major changes in the years between 1798 and 1916, including Catholic emancipation, the Great Famine, and the Land War, with poverty being a consistent observable theme throughout each of these events. Additionally, poverty altered roles of women in Irish society, and this expansion of their roles enabled them to become legitimate political forces.

Poverty in nineteenth century Ireland is associated with the aforementioned oppressive rule of Great Britain. Examples of this oppression include the penal laws that placed restraints on Catholics and non-conforming Protestants (essentially anyone outside the Church of England) and laissez-faire approaches in maintaining the Irish economy. Even in times of great need, such as during the Great Famine, the British government was reluctant to intervene in Irish economic affairs. Scholars collectively agree that Britain "failed to act decisively" to help mitigate the poverty that came as a result of the famine, and this would not be the last time the British government turned a blind eye to Irish suffering.[21] This research will explore Irish poverty through the lens of two occurrences that made the socio-economic plight of Ireland especially unique in the nineteenth century; the Great Famine and the Land War, both of which are events that highlight British apathy and even resentment towards those who experienced poverty in Ireland.

Starvation and agrarian conflict were rampant in the mid to latter half of the 1800s for the working class Irish, though Parliament thought of Irish distress as an invitation to reform

[21] Haverty, *Constance Markievicz,* 6.

the Irish economy and structure rather than a plea to help the poor.[22] This context distinguishes the Irish from other peoples who also suffered in this period, making the circumstances surrounding this poverty important in understanding the way women transformed their response to it in a politically relevant way. Bringing women's activism into the study of poverty in Ireland also ties into some popular ideas about women of this era – domestic conduct literature of Victorian England characterized women as "angels of the house" and guardians of virtue, one who maintains morality of the family, and while caring for and nurturing those in need (this mostly referred to children, but could be applied to most vulnerable populations). Thus, cultivating a nurturing spirit through charity in political activism shows how Irish women acted within what scholars call constrained agency — or a constraint on one's ability to act intentionally and control their decision-making.[23] Gender theorist Judith Butler postulates in her work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* the concept of constrained agency in which patterns of authoritative language and powerful cultural norms function as a complex network that individuals cannot fully escape. Butler asserts that individuals can bring about change from frequent small shifts within the authoritative structure. In the aggregate, Butler contends that these small shifts can ultimately restructure power relationships. The narrative of Irish nationalism and the role that middle-class women played in utilizing poverty to engage in political activism fits within Butler's

[22] Christine Kinealy, "The Irish Famine 1845 - 52," *North Irish Roots* 2, no. 5 (1990): 159, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27696747.

[23] Linda Nash, "The Agency of Nature or the Nature of Agency?," *Environmental History* 10, no. 1 (2005): 67 http://www.jstor.org/stable/3985846.

theory.[24] Because of ideas that sought to limit women as nurturing homemakers, Irish women took to feeding their political convictions in whatever way the confinements of society would allow them, and later challenged the cultural norms of their time.

It is increasingly apparent that the connected nature of women's activism, poverty, and nationalism in relationship to the greater Irish nationalist movement should be further explored and addressed. Such study will serve as a vehicle for understanding the ways women worked within and beyond constrained agency for the sake of their political goals and the sovereignty of their nation. While some women like Markievicz found ways to defy the delicate expectations of her sex by entering government and engaging in combat, other women contributed to the nationalist movement through activism perhaps more "appropriate" for women of their era – including running soup kitchens, raising awareness of transformative ways to raise Irish children, and caring for their injured and sick male counterparts as they fought for the cause of Irish sovereignty. Ultimately, poverty and attempts to mitigate it gave women an opportunity to be politically active but also socially acceptable. Some women also tried to change delicate expectations of their sex by demonstrating forms of activism comparable to that of their male counterparts. Nationalist women of Ireland came together under the notion of "Ireland first" – and a key element to this notion was the poverty of the Irish people, whose suffering was blamed on British policies that suppressed their liberty and instilled limited freedom for all Irish people, not just women. In studies of nationalism and women's history, the nineteenth century in Ireland invites new and instructive discussion about poverty's ability to fuel a political movement.

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[24] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

This research is rooted in, and intends to build upon, the extant literature on Irish nationalist women, including Margaret Ward's *Unmanageable Revolutionaries,* which unpacks the legacy of women in Irish history from 1881 onward. Ward is one of the leading scholars on Irish nationalist women and their movements. In this particular work, Ward argues that women's contributions to Irish history were meaningful but in many ways forgotten, and that disagreements between Irish nationalist women about their priorities in respects to women's rights led to a disunited front that made their impact smaller than it could have been.[25] Ward investigates the Ladies Land League and *Inghinidhe na hEireann*, two groups who were transformative in women's nationalist activism in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth century. This thesis intends to build on that by bringing in poverty as a central motivator for the actions of these groups. It additionally relies on Ward's biography of Maud Gonne, coined Ireland's Joan of Arc, as it provides more insightful commentary on similar topics. In this work, Ward argues ultimately for the historical legitimacy of Gonne and unpacks her legacy on Irish history, a history with narratives defined by the stories of men. This thesis relies on Ward's accounts of Gonne's early life and pre-1900 activism to explore how poverty and the plight of oppressed people shaped much of her legacy.

These sources from Ward offer in-depth insights on how these women communicated their most authentic political sentiments. The autobiography of Maud Gonne serves a similar purpose. Though the personal perspective of Gonne herself may host some intrinsic bias, it still serves as a fascinating and intimate look into her life and experiences as one of Ireland's prominent female nationalists. Much of the secondary scholarship pertaining to these women

[25] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries,* ix.

rests on the claim that women have a marginal status in Irish society's historical conscience, and that stories of women like Gonne and organizations like the Ladies Land League may challenge or further enhance mainstream narratives. This thesis also makes use of Anne Haverty's comprehensive biography of Constance Markievicz, particularly information about her early life that set a precedent for her twentieth century activism. Similarly to Ward, Haverty demonstrates Markievicz's historical legitimacy and overall contributions to the nationalist movement by telling the story of her life through primary and secondary sources. Other scholarly articles by experts in the field of women's history have also been utilized to further understand the backstory of women who interacted with nationalist ideas through mitigation of poverty and other forms of social activism. These include Susan B. Egenolf's writing on female narrations of the 1798 rebellion, Christine Kinealy's assessments on the Great Irish Famine, and Dana Hearne's various writings on the leadership of the Ladies Land League.

In addition to biographical references of relevant women in Ireland's independence fight, scholarship pertaining to nationalism as an ideology has also helped form this thesis. Political theorist Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* provides the foundational framework in understanding how a network of Irish (often, but not always, Catholic) activist-minded individuals formed an intangible yet powerful community united in their opposition to British rule. This thesis seeks to examine the branch of this community made up of women and inspired by serving those suffering under a unique brand of Irish poverty perpetuated by British policies. In doing so, it also examines Poor Law policies and scholarship pertaining to poverty in general in the nineteenth century, leaning heavily on research and analysis from poverty scholar Virginia Crossman in *Politics, Pauperism, and Power in Late Nineteenth-*

Century Ireland, where she explores the expansion of social welfare in post-famine Ireland to argue for the legitimacy of the poor law system in shaping Ireland's economic history. Crossman also specifically refers to women's roles in poor law administration and argues that their roles in administering poor law were historically relevant. This thesis aspires to explore these connections more deeply using these sources as building blocks.

This thesis aspires to bring such multidisciplinary and multifaceted themes together under the investigatory question of how poverty formed women's nationalism in Ireland. By analyzing and building upon the extant scholarship pertaining to the separate individual themes of women's activism, poverty, and nationalism, as well as available primary sources that encapsulate ideas that reflect these themes, this research seeks to ultimately explore the political and cultural climate that led to the establishment of a women's nationalist group like the Daughters of Erin at the turn of the century.

CHAPTER I

1798 AND THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

The story of nationalist women has roots deep into the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in Ireland. This time period saw a divided Ireland in a number of different ways, and these divides would fuel the nineteenth century conflicts that brought women into nationalism. Contextualizing religious divides between Ireland and Britain is key to understanding the oppressive relationship between the two nations. In post-Reformation Europe, England aggressively embraced the faith of the Church of England in contrast to Catholic Ireland. The first set of penal laws introduced by Parliament and Church of England officials have roots in the Education Act of 1695, leading to an age of exceptional unrest and government efforts to mitigate said unrest.[26] Catholics and non-conforming Protestants (non-members of the Church of England) became societal outcasts when England took to disenfranchising them from their own nation. Penal laws also banned dissenters from serving in the military, studying law or medicine, owning a horse worth over five pounds, speaking the Irish language, and most strikingly, forced them to split up land inheritance equally amongst all of their children.[27] This resulted in small plots of land for many Irish Catholic landowners and limited abilities to grow crops, and the only way around these oppressive rules was through submission to the Church of England or attempted acts of rebellion. These

[26] Susan B. Egenolf, "'Our Fellow-Creatures': Women Narrating Political Violence in the 1798 Irish Rebellion," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42, no. 2 (2009): 220, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40264251.

[27] Samantha Howell, "From Oppression to Nationalism: The Irish Penal Laws of 1695," *Hohonu* 14 (2014) 21-23.

laws set the groundwork for plight that would inspire nationalist activity throughout the nineteenth century.

Poverty ran rampant amongst Irish Catholics as a result of disenfranchisement from penal laws, and since they made up a majority of the country's population, disillusionment and unrest were inevitable. Though rollback on penal laws started in 1791, the British government continued to cultivate an atmosphere that disenfranchised the Irish people and undermined their personal and national sovereignty. As a result, rebellions and uprisings indeed took place, further creating an atmosphere that birthed the nationalist independence group, the United Irishmen. This group sought to unite all forms of dissenters under the common name of Irishman and to rebuke British rule. Famously in 1798, they rose in arms across Ireland (with especially great strength in County Wexford) for the purpose of establishing equal representation for all people regardless of religious affiliation and independence from restrictive laws of the Westminster Parliament. This was carried out with support from French forces, who were experiencing political and cultural revolution in their country as well.[28] Anti-British sentiment paired with the United Irishmen's admiration of Enlightenment and revolutionary ideas made for strong French support. A multitude of French forces aspired to a republic of their own, and were willing to aid other nations to do the same, especially if doing so castigated Britain. After three months of bloodshed, many rebels were exiled out of the country after Britain came down with an iron fist in order to reestablish stability in what was then the Kingdom of Ireland.

[28] Egenolf, "Our Fellow-Creatures," 220.

Female involvement in the United Irishmen's uprising took place because women too had stakes in this republican cause, and appeared to be politicized activists, just like their male counterparts. Such stakes were that women too felt the oppression of penal laws and general oppression from the Crown, and felt that an independent Irish republic would better serve the needs of not only men but also the women of Ireland. One way women supported the uprising was by hanging green cloths above their homes to welcome rebels in and tend to their wide variety of needs, echoing an idea that they had an innate propensity to receive people into their homes and serve them.[29] However, this was not the exclusive medium for female political engagement. Female combatants of the 1798 Rebellion were discussed in an account by Irish politician and writer, Sir Richard Musgrave. He describes seeing a multitude of women taking part in the Battle of Vinegar Hill and how they were "more vehement than the men," which is an impressive assessment.[30] These women helped transport intelligence, supplied information to rebels, helped with planning the continuation of the rebellion, and "fought with fury."[31] Thomas Cloney, a leader who helped coordinate the 1798 rebellion in Wexford, describes a female combatant named Moll Doyle as a warlike amazon woman with great bravery.[32] These accounts further a narrative that women were multifaceted in their engagement with the uprising, and since they were concerned with the welfare of those who

[29] Catherine O'Connor, "The Experience of Women in the Rebellion of 1798 in Wexford," *The Past: The Organ of the Uí Cinsealaigh Historical Society*, no. 24 (2003): 95, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25520079.

[30] Quoted in *Ibid.*, 96.

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] *Ibid.*

suffered under the penal laws, they were inspired to engage with this nationalist uprising. The rebellion overall was a result of the discrimination towards religious minorities, lack of representation for the poor in the Irish parliament, and the desire for better conditions fueled by several ideas of the French revolution. The pairing of these troubles created conditions that the Irish believed were worth rebelling against. Republican and nationalist style activism only begins here and carries on throughout 1800s Ireland, and women would continue to be impacted by such activism and would find ways to engage with it.

Women's additional roles in 1798 involved caring for the wounded and helping keep a general sense of order, as much as what was possible in the midst of political rebellion. Aiding their peers in the midst of turmoil — which was within the sphere of what was expected of women at this time — was reflected in a letter of a woman named Jane Adams as she lived through this time of rebellion. Adams gave a detailed account of her experiences with her family and interactions with politically active forces throughout her home in the especially turbulent County Wexford. She reflects on preparing breakfast for her family, taking care of her sick father, and inquiring about her brother in a nearby rebel camp out of concern for his well-being.[33]

> The first question I used to ask Hayes every night, on his return from the rebel camp, was, 'have you heard any thing of my brother or Mrs. Owen?' One night I was obliged to repeat the question, and, on looking at Hayes, I evidently saw his countenance marked with visible concern, and he appeared not to like to answer my question. I felt terrified, and desired he would not keep me in suspense—I guessed all—'they are murdered, I suppose.' 'No, Madam, not so bad; but Mr. Owen has been taken prisoner, at the head of 500 of his parishioners. He was brought into the rebel camp, and from thence marched into the jail of Gorey; and indeed, Madam, I am afraid he is a little *light* in his head.' At once it flashed across me that the strong sense of his

[33] Jane Adams, Letter to "My dear friend". "Letter from Jane Adams, Containing a Private Narrative of the Rebellion of 1798." Co. Wexford, Ireland, 1798 Corpus of Electronic Texts Edition: E790001.

> situation, his wife, (who was near being confined,) and that of his eight children, had deprived him of his senses. This so completely overpowered me, I fell against a table, and was for some time insensible.

Her account captures the gravity of the situation, and the helplessness she feels in being unable to know of her brother's well-being as a politically active rebel. It is unique to have such a detailed description of a woman's experience in such a turbulent event at the end of the eighteenth century. However, her experience is that of only one woman, and different women interacted with this rebellion in unique ways. In contrast to the gentle and delicate Adams are the warlike women described by Sir Richard Musgrave and Thomas Cloney, demonstrating that women in 1798 were multidimensional, but ultimately inspired by a desire for national sovereignty. This desire was framed by conditions of oppression and poverty, and something that all the women involved in this rebellion have in common is a concern for those suffering under conditions imposed by Britain.

These accounts represent only one piece of the overall movement of women stepping into a republican uprising fueled by a desire to fight and avenge oppression. Ultimately, the 1798 rebellion was put down as a result of more advanced weaponry on the English side; this led to a multitude of surrenders for rebels throughout Ireland. Though it ended in failure, it was only the beginning of a greater pursuit of independence, and as time passed, socioeconomic burdens in Ireland were exacerbated as the nineteenth century dawned. Irish women were about to experience a steady increase in nationalist activism throughout the 1800s, and poverty was a consistent theme that inspired many of their actions, helping draw women into the political realm. Through this activism, women found new waves of expressing their voices and speaking to their unique interests, pertaining both to sex and country.

As a partial response to the Irish Rebellion of 1798, the British and Irish parliaments voted to merge into one exclusive British Parliament, creating the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1800. This was the end of the Kingdom of Ireland and a new beginning of exclusive rule from Westminster. This merged parliament meant new things for Ireland's pursuit of independence as Westminster now had a more direct role in formulating Irish political affairs. Additionally, the merging of these two groups also meant the merging of the Church of Ireland and the Church of England, the Irish Army and the British Army, and in an intangible way, the merging of two separate cultures and people. Despite this merging, poor relief systems that were developed in later years were distinct and designed to cater to the unique needs of the separate nations.[34] This reflected the distinct cultures still demonstrating their differences even though their governments became forcibly unified. In the years following the Act of Union, oppressed groups in Ireland would continue to fight for legitimacy and representation.

A defining issue of early nineteenth century Ireland was Catholic Emancipation, the long-term process of reducing restrictions on Catholics in Ireland. Daniel O'Connell spearheaded this movement (1775-1847). A devout Catholic himself, as well as an advocate for international abolition and the mitigation of poverty, O'Connell helped mobilize poor Irish Catholics so that penal law restrictions could continue to be eased, earning him the nickname of *'the Liberator*.' His establishment of the Catholic Association in 1828 and the success of the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829 (which repealed extant penal laws and allowed Catholics to serve in Parliament), helped O'Connell embody a unique brand of

[34] Virginia Crossman, *Politics, Pauperism and Power in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014) 6.

political genius which caused great reverence for him as a Member of Parliament and a leader for faithful Irish Catholics facing British Protestant oppression. Women had a seat at the table in "O'Connellite Politics," and O'Connell is responsible for establishing two organizations that impacted the way women interacted with Irish politics: The Catholic Association and the Precursor Society. While women were not admitted as full members of the Catholic Association, they fundraised and were welcomed to make financial contributions to combat oppression of Catholics in Ireland. O'Connell, however, believed that admitting women to the Precursor Society would encourage more male membership and increase the odds of fulfilling the group's purpose, which was pushing for reforms that would eventually repeal the Act of Union and restore a degree of Irish sovereignty.[35] Presumably, he concluded that women would attract like-minded men who would make the movement stronger.

Future generations of Irish women would see that in certain contexts, femininity and beauty were weapons they could use to advance their political cause. Maud Gonne is one of the consistent faces of Irish nationalist women, and though her activism was in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century, her beauty was described as having "an electrifying effect in the dull little country towns."[36] Such beauty was a trait that was exclusively embodied by women, and O'Connell may have noted that in his acceptance of women into his political activism. Women in nationalism faced unique challenges, but also found advantages in their femininity that they capitalized on when necessary. The formal admittance of women into the Precursor Society was a first for Irish political organizations,

[35] Mary O'Dowd, "Women and O'Connellite Politics, 1824-45," *History Ireland* 22, no. 5 (2014): 33, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23850524.

[36] Ward, *Maud Gonne,* 38.

and indicates that the relationship between poverty and women's activism has roots in this particular era of the 1830s.[37]

In addition to engaging in the political fight for Catholics, women also had roles in Poor Law administration. The 1830s in Ireland also witnessed the birth of this system which its architect, the Englishman Sir George Nicholls, described as similar in principle to English Poor Law. It sought to "relieve the community from the demoralisation [*sic*] as well as from the danger consequent on the prevalence of extensive and unmitigated destitution," but developed unique characteristics given the conditions of the Irish people.[38] Ireland in the nineteenth century was particularly rural in comparison to the rest of western Europe with much smaller concentrated populations in towns, and their culture and economy reflected this unique aspect of their demographic.[39] Poor laws essentially intended to make Ireland more like Britain, and to inspire more responsibility, prosperity, and industriousness for Ireland, adding a layer of political nuance to poor law administration as opposed to it being an entirely altruistic measure.[40] It was not uncommon for the British government to see Ireland in need of civilizing, which explains why poor law administration and Britain's general attempts to mitigate poverty had ulterior political motives.

Women's roles as activists and poor law administrators manifest more deeply in the post famine years, but it is worth examining how women interacted with Ireland's culture

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[37] Mary O'Dowd, "Women and O'Connellite Politics, 1824-45," *History Ireland* 22, no. 5 (2014): 33, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23850524.

[38] Crossman, *Politics, Pauperism and Power,* 185.

[39] Hughes, "The Origin and Growth of Towns in Ireland," 14.

[40] Crossman, *Politics, Pauperism and Power,* 37.

and economy before developing a strong nationalist identity. By 1824, Ireland's contribution to the British economy was integral, but subservient.[41] Essentially, the Irish nation produced a multitude of exports on their own, but were still required to adhere to regulations set by Parliament, and were impacted by English economic developments. Increasing trends of mechanization in Britain left many women, especially in Ulster and Connaught, without work and impoverished.[42] The nature of their work made them replaceable by developing technology in both rural and urban areas. Women, given their responsibility for childrearing and preserving the sanctity of the home, bore the brunt of and embodied the pain of poverty in more tangible and visible ways. This could indicate part of why the poor law system was predominately designed to help women, despite the system being designed and run predominately by men until the late nineteenth century.[43]

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were eventful for Ireland and brought forth winds of change. The rebellion in 1798 was one of the first violent expressions of disdain towards British policies that were impoverishing the Irish people, and women's involvement in this event demonstrated their propensity towards nationalist tendencies despite the delicate expectations of them. Women worked within their constrained agency in 1798 to assume more traditional roles such as the ones of Jane Adams, but also broke the norms associated with their sex by also assuming roles typically reserved for men, including combat roles and the moving of intelligence for rebel forces. 1798 would grow to be

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[41] Deborah Oxley, "Living Standards of Women in Prefamine Ireland," *Social Science History* 28, no. 2 (2004): 275, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40267843.

[42] *Ibid.*

[43] Crossman, *Politics, Pauperism and Power,* 184.

cherished by future generations of female nationalists, but in the early years after the rebellion, women found themselves slowly but surely assimilating into the nationalist movement through Daniel O'Connell's Catholic Emancipation movement. It would be an overstatement to say that Catholicism and poverty were directly linked in Ireland, but scholars have noted that Ireland's Catholic identity grew to represent an identity antithetical to the wealth and privilege of British Protestants.[44] These moving parts represent the beginning of an interface between women's activism, nationalism, and poverty that would increase as the nineteenth century progressed. Furthermore, the Daughters of Erin would cherish the events of 1798 and benefit from the progress made in the Catholic Emancipation movement, making the early nineteenth century's events vital to understanding how the Daughters came to be in their time and place in 1900.

[44] Haverty, *Constance Markievicz*, 6.

CHAPTER II

GREAT FAMINE

A political and cultural turning point in Irish history is an event that is well known and mourned across Ireland and the world: The Great Famine. The blight that first destroyed the potato crop in 1845 sparked the establishment of relief communities, cultivation of public works projects, and active examination of the existing Irish Poor Law. The poor law divided Ireland into different unions, and each union had a respective workhouse, where many Irish would take part in hard labor in brutal conditions in exchange for two meals a day.[45] Before this system, however, Ireland's economy and culture was defined by the fact that Irish people lived in mostly rural areas. In the years before the famine, Ireland depended on the potato because of its nutrients and ability to feed large families. Given that many of these families had no choice but to work on small plots of rented land, the potato was the optimal crop because it could grow abundantly in small areas. When the fungus *phytophthora infestans* attacked the 1845 harvest, Irish farmers were devastated to find that their beloved Irish Lumper turned into a black, rotten, soapy, mass with an extremely foul odor.[46] Smelling a potato infected with such blight was enough to make a person vomit, eating one could cause extreme illness. With the main food staple for so many people essentially being poisoned, a great crisis ensued. The blight affected families across Ireland, and for women, this meant a changing of roles to better serve themselves and their families in a time of great suffering and limited help.

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[45] Kinealy, "The Irish Famine 1845 - 52," 158.

[46] Patricia Lysaght, "Perspectives on Women during the Great Irish Famine from the Oral Tradition," *Béaloideas* 64/65 (1996): 63, https://doi.org/10.2307/20522462.

The Great Famine was one of Europe's mightiest agricultural disasters. It permanently altered Ireland's population as roughly one million died due to starvation and disease, as well as excessive amounts of forced migration. Measures of aid within Ireland were not as expansive as necessary. With Irish distress being considered a "side issue" in Parliament, Britain adopted a *laissez-faire* approach as their central strategy. This approach was surprisingly cold given the starvation, disease, and financial collapse that destroyed the stability and well-being of families.[47] Sir Charles Trevelyan, a civil servant with a great influence over the actions of the British government during the famine, declared that the "great evil" Britain must contend with was not famine itself, but rather the moral evils of the Irish people.[48] His judgement of the Irish population was that they were lazy, archaic, unadvanced, and therefore deserving of the ramifications that came from that. The Irish continued to be culturally demeaned for their perceived lack of civility in comparison to their English counterparts and Englishmen often equated the suffering the Irish experienced in the mid-nineteenth century to an act of God — a punishment for their uncivil ways and barbaric religious beliefs. Trevelyan's beliefs about the Irish that invoked morality and divine judgement justified much of Britain's inaction, and those who suffered in Ireland were seen as deserving of their condition and unworthy of help.

Not everyone in the British government espoused such toxic views towards the Irish, and Parliament enacted some notable measures to mitigate the starvation and other crises that stemmed from the Great Famine. Prime Minister Robert Peel attempted to enact relief

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[47] Kinealy, "The Irish Famine 1845-52," 159.

[48] Patrick Brantlinger, "The Famine," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 32, no. 1 (2004): 198, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25058660.

policies designed to provide affordable food for the poor, including grain imports from North America. However, the Corn Laws, which placed tariffs on imported food, complicated the issue in Parliament. Despite these possibly redeeming qualities, Peel still appointed Charles Trevelyan to oversee relief, and Trevelyan's unflattering assessments of Irish culture and character ensured that Britain's approach would prioritize reform for Ireland's society rather than immediate altruistic service to those in need.[49] Furthermore, Lord John Russell, who was dedicated to the *laissez-faire* approach, succeeded Robert Peel in 1846. He too was forced to confront a starving and needy population, as the potato crop continued to fail on and off in the years between 1845 and 1852. Russell allowed for the opening of soup kitchens and expanded the availability of money loans, but brought most relief programs to an end in 1847.[50] In spite of these measures put in place by Russell, the Irish still grew resentful of these half-hearted attempts at help from the government, and furthered their desire to distance themselves from British rule. These sentiments were felt by men and women alike.

There are two important extrapolations to make on the Great Famine when studying women's history and nationalism: one is that Great Britain's response to the famine severed any remaining positive sentiments towards British rule, making the many of the Irish people more resentful and suspicious of Parliament in general. The other is that women's

[49] Ellen-Marie Pedersen, "Star of the Sea: Robert Peel's Generous Relief Policies," Star of the Sea: A Postcolonial/Postmodern Voyage into the Irish Famine, 2016, https://scalar.usc.edu/works/star-of-the-sea-a-postcolonialpostmodern-voyage-into-the-irish-famine/british-government-relief.

[50] Marjie Bloy, "The Irish Famine: 1845-9," The Irish Famine, 2015, https://victorianweb.org/history/famine.html.

experiences in the Great Famine altered their roles in the home and family, and despite the hardship, furthered their ability to act as future political activists on behalf of the Irish people.[51] While aiding the poor, managing food supply, and dividing it amongst family members during meals was a common traditional expectation of a housewife in rural Ireland, oral traditions of women indicate that they were forced to go beyond those roles and actually help procure food for their families, a responsibility conventionally reserved for men.[52] Such a change in expectations and the elevation to a more equal status with men indicates that the Great Famine was a key event for shaping women in Ireland. Women made "exceptional efforts" to find Indian meal for their often-starving children. Professor and scholar of Irish history Patricia Lysaght analyzes oral accounts of women from the Great Famine, and her work has pointed to several instances of women having to take pragmatic measures for the sake of their families. She describes the story of a woman from County Clare who had the choice to either buy a coffin for her deceased husband or food for her sick and starving children, and selects the latter.[53]

The Illustrated London News reported on female-specific suffering in Famine times from 1849-1850. The newspaper printed illustrations from a talented artist named John Mahony alongside reports of the conditions of the Irish poor in this troubling time. A particularly damning illustration depicts a woman and her children who appear distressed and

[51] Lysaght, "Perspectives on Women during the Great Irish Famine from the Oral Tradition," 78.

[52] *Ibid.*

[53] *Ibid.*

poor. This woman was Bridget O'Donnell, a wife and mother living in the time of the Famine. *The Illustrated London News* published the image alongside her experience in 1849:

> I lived on the lands of Gurranenatuoha [Garraunnatooha, Kilmacduane Parish]. My husband held four acres and a half of land, and three acres of bog land; our yearly rent was £7 4s.; we were put out last November; he owed some rent. We got thirty stone of oats from Mr. Marcus Keane, for seed. My husband gave some writing for it: he was paid for it. He paid ten shillings for reaping the corn. As soon as it was stacked, one "Blake" on the farm, who was put to watch it, took it away in to his own haggard and kept it there for a fortnight by Dan Sheedey's orders. They then thrashed it in Frank Lallis's barn. I was at this time lying in fever. Dan Sheedey and five or six men came to tumble my house; they wanted me to give possession. I said that I would not; I had fever, and was within two months of my down-lying (confinement); they commenced knocking down the house, and had half of it knocked down when two neighbours, women, Nell Spellesley and Kate How, carried me out. I had the priest and doctor to attend me shortly after. Father Meehan anointed me. I was carried into a cabin, and lay there for eight days, when I had the creature (the child) born dead. I lay for three weeks after that. The whole of my family got the fever, and one boy thirteen years old died with want and with hunger while we were lying sick. Dan Sheedey and Blake took the corn into Kilrush, and sold it. I don't know what they got for it. I had not a bit for my children to eat when they took if from me.[54]

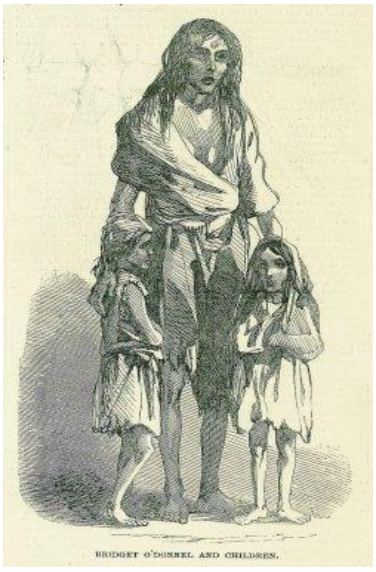

Figure 1: The Illustrated London News, December 22, 1849, 404.

[54] "Condition of Ireland. Illustrations of the New Poor Law," *The Illustrated London News*, December 22, 1849, 404.

O'Donnell's experience with eviction and disease is only one story that reflects a specific form of the uniqueness of women's suffering in the Great Famine, given their responsibilities in child bearing and rearing. The Catholic identity of Ireland is reflected in her mentioning of the priest who anointed her in her time of trouble, and this aspect of Irish identity often complemented the nationalistic sentiments that this time period saw develop. O'Donnell's story also clearly demonstrates the hardship of pregnancy and the loss of a child, and how such challenges were exacerbated in this time. For a number of reasons, it became increasingly difficult for women to fulfill their obligations to their family and forced them to take pragmatic actions, such as the woman from County Clare who chose feeding her children instead of having proper burial for her husband. In the future, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women would refer to the Great Famine when channeling nationalist sentiments and encouraging others to advance Irish independence.

Due to the unique challenges faced by women in the Great Famine, Irish women attempted to mitigate burdensome conditions through engaging in charitable acts. Maria Luddy, a professor of Irish women's history, discusses the philanthropic engagements of both Catholic and Protestant women in nineteenth century Ireland throughout her scholarship. She sheds light on the special organizations made to help women in the era of the famine, so that their families and communities as a whole would also be helped. By January of 1847, the Cork Ladies' Relief Society for the South of Ireland functioned to provide female members of families with work or the means to work.[55] Other similar organizations existed, such as the

[55] Maria Luddy, "Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland," *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 7, no. 4 (1996): 359, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27927533.

Belfast Ladies' Relief Association for Connaught. This organization sought out similar goals to the Cork society, but emphasized a spiritual element to their ministry as well. They aimed to "improve, by industry, the temporal [condition] of the poor females of Connaught and their spiritual condition by the truth of the bible."[56] Luddy also notes the impact of nuns and how in many cases, they opened their convents to feed the starving and tend to the ill in their hospitals.[57] On a macro level, women took special action to target poverty in a number of different ways because they saw the cultural, political, and economic impact of it throughout their community. Though women's agency was limited in the nineteenth century, they were not protected from the impacts of poverty on their communities and were inspired to address it.

The Great Famine would serve as inspiration for women of future generations to continue to fight for the poor and underprivileged. Stories of hardship from the famine transcended its time, and the pain and suffering that occurred served as a weapon for advancing the idea that Ireland should be free from their British oppressors. In her biography of Maud Gonne, Margaret Ward describes a speech by Gonne that refers to the Great Famine that left the audience weeping, and unsurprisingly, inspired sentiments of violence towards Britain, as she shifted much of the blame for the ramifications of the famine onto Parliament's shortcomings.[58] Gonne, in her own words, drew upon memories of women's hardships, like those of Bridget O'Donnell, to influence the nationalist cause in her tours as

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[56] *Ibid.*

[57] Luddy, "Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland,"359.

[58] Ward, *Maud Gonne,* 35.

an orator and representative of the nationalist cause. Her speeches were her trademark style of spreading nationalist rhetoric, and in a particularly convincing one, she states the following of the Great Famine:

> It is only fifty years ago; it still lives in thousands of memories. I have been told it by women who have heard the last sigh of their children without being able to relieve their agony with one drop of milk. It has seemed to me at evening, on those mountains of Ireland, so full of savage majesty, when the winds sighed over the pits of the famine, where thousands of dead enrich the harvests of the future,—it has seemed to me that I heard an avenging voice calling down on our oppressors the execration of men and the justice of God.[59]

This terrible reality, the reality of Bridget O'Donnell and her children and so many other Irish women, wounded the soul of Ireland's nation. Such memories of this reality transcended generations as evident of the words of Gonne, who seems inspired to avenge these past travesties. Women being unable to take care of their children is a powerful trope, and Gonne used that painful yet potent reality of poverty to inspire others to join the nationalist cause, as it inspired her.

Gonne also kept the memory of the Great Famine alive when blight struck Irish crops in County Limerick and County Clare in 1897.[60] Inadequate relief measures greatly troubled her, and she further explores ways to mitigate the pain suffered by poor people in her autobiography. She writes extensively about James Connolly's (1868-1916) ideas about Catholicism and the right to food, which indicated that human laws or government

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[59] Maud Gonne MacBride, Alexander Norman Jeffares, and Anna MacBride White, *The Autobiography of Maud Gonne: A Servant of the Queen* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 154-155.

[60] "Potato Blight Ravages in Ireland: Crops Severely Affected," *The Australian Star*, Sydney, August 18, 1897, 6.

restrictions cannot stand in the way of divine law that protects the health of their mind and bodies, and went as far as writing a leaflet with him on the subject.[61] Connolly, a republican, socialist, and union leader, would later die by execution for his role in the 1916 Easter Rising. He is one of the signers of the 1916 Proclamation as well. Gonne and Connolly wrote: "The very highest authorities on the Doctrine of the Church agree that no *human* law can stand between starving people and the RIGHT TO FOOD including the right to take that food whenever they find it, openly or secretly, with or without the owner's permission."[62] In this leaflet, Gonne and Conolly echo Ireland's religious identity by writing about how the fight against poverty actually complements Catholic doctrine. It is written in reference to starving people during the Great Famine, but intended to inspire the poor in their time in the 1890s with blight returning and a tentative famine on the horizon.

On a more macro level, the Great Famine wounded the soul of the Irish nation as whole. A steep population decline took place due to roughly one million people dying and another million emigrating in the years of the famine. Historians like Tim Pat Coogan have argued that the famine perpetuated a sense of "learned helplessness" because of the levels of despair and loss of population, and point to how many Irish in the twentieth century shrank from early marriages and big families out of fear of what possible hardships loomed in the future.[63] Nonetheless, even in the middle of the famine, Ireland's political life and energy

[61] MacBride et al., *The Autobiography of Maud Gonne*, 239-240.

[62] MacBride et al., *The Autobiography of Maud Gonne*, 240.

[63] Tim Pat Coogan, *1916: One Hundred Years of Irish Independence: from the Easter Rising to the Present* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin's Press, 2016), 93.

sustained itself.[64] The radical spirit in Europe amidst the 1848 revolutions did not bypass Ireland, and the intellectual sides of nationalism and republicanism developed in this time, even in the midst of great suffering. The Young Irelander rebellion represented another failed nationalist upbringing that took place in the midst of Europe's revolutionary era that police reinforcements put down. Ireland remained in the midst of famine and had internal issues to address outside of political nationalism. Ultimately, the Great Famine altered the very fabric of Irish society socioeconomically, culturally, and politically, as the trauma inflicted by famine was often blamed on England's tame response. More specifically, it witnessed a change in the role of women in the family, giving them the means of becoming a more active figure that provided significant contributions to the household so that her family could survive.

The impact of the famine was not limited to economic and cultural spheres; it also altered the linguistics of the nation. Gaelic Irish, a language still spoken by small populations in the modern Republic, was the language spoken by a majority of the population in western Ireland in the pre-famine era. It is a Celtic language with ancient roots and a deep presence in poor rural populations of the nineteenth century. Given the Great Famine's toll on this particular demographic of southwestern rural Ireland, nearly a whole generation of Irish speakers either emigrated to English speaking regions of the world, or died.[65] Irish nationalist women knew the cultural value of the Irish language, which is why the Daughters of Erin

[64] *Ibid.,* 12.

[65] Andrew Carnie, "Modern Irish: A Case Study in Language Revival Failure," 1996, 99-114, MIT Working Papers in Linguistics, https://carnie.sbs.arizona.edu/sites/carnie.sbs.arizona.edu/files/publications/Endangered.pdf.

made the re-establishment of the language one of their core values. It is why Constance Markievicz spent much of her time learning the Irish language, despite its grammatical difficulty.[66] She would later give speeches in the Irish language, often for the sake of communicating the needs of Ireland's poor. The tragedy of the Great Famine sheds a great degree of light on women's experiences during hardship, and how women from the next generation would use their knowledge of it as a nationalistic tool to continue fighting for not just independence but also assistance for the poor.

While it may not be surprising that the infamous Great Famine was deeply intertwined with poverty in Ireland, what is novel and fascinating are women's roles, depictions, and future convictions about the famine that fueled Irish nationalist women. Whether it be Maud Gonne channeling memories of the famine that brought her audience to tears or Constance Markievicz pouring over the language that the famine almost eradicated, it is clear that it formed the Irish social conscience in more ways than one. It enabled women's roles to expand for the sake of survival and coincided with another turbulent period in European history that fed nationalist tendencies. The post-famine years would see an even stronger transformation of Irish nationalism with women's roles in the movement developing in strength and number. The Daughters of Erin's establishments rests heavily on the shoulders of these multilayered events of Ireland's nineteenth century.

[66] Haverty, *Constance Markievicz*, 200.

CHAPTER III

LADIES LAND LEAGUE

The post-famine years saw an expansion of the Irish diaspora due to the forced emigration, and with that came massive growth of the Irish nationalist movement as a whole. Additionally, The Irish Republican Brotherhood, colloquially known as the Fenian movement, was established in 1858 and operated in both Ireland and the United States. This gave a trans-Atlantic dimension to the movement dedicated to the pursuit of an Irish republic that was willing to act with violence if necessary. Fenians were nationalist in every sense of the word and occupied the historical timeline of history between the famine and the later agrarian conflict known as the Land War. They were an organization for men that allowed them to form communities, develop political and social skills, and practice the Irish language with a great emphasis on nationalism.[67] Fenian Michael Davitt (1846-1906) and nationalist M.P. Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-1891) later established the Land League in 1879, and its auxiliary group, the Ladies Land League, provided women with many opportunities to engage with Irish nationalism through agrarian agitation and pursuing rights and reform for tenant farmers.

The original Land League formed to address the "central Irish socioeconomic issue" of the time, which was that a small minority of protestant Anglo-Irish landlords owned and maintained the land where Irish Catholics resided.[68] Their traditional approach to combat this

[67] Seán Bagnall, "The Fenian Rising in Dublin 1867," *Dublin Historical Record* 70, no. 2 (2017): 215, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44985485.

[68] Timothy M. O'Neill, "Irish Nationalist Movement Since 1800," *Encyclopedia of Western Colonialism since 1450,* (2007).

issue was to raise and distribute funds and support those in distress as a result, considering unfair and unjust evictions rooted in prejudice were well documented and not at all uncommon.[69] An 1887 document refers to evictions in Ireland as a near daily occurrence with "pauperism, starvation, disease, and consequent death" as common results.[70] *The London Times* also stated that "landlords exercised their rights with hands of iron," and that such evictions could be categorized as the "systematic plundering of the Irish people of their lands."[71] Charles Stewart Parnell also led the fight for Home Rule in Parliament, which sought self-government for the Irish people within the United Kingdom, demonstrating an all-encompassing spirit of organized nationalism growing at this time. The women involved in this process paralleled such characteristics but are, however, far less studied. Their contributions are not as well known, but their impact was substantial. Margaret Ward argues that the reason women's roles in the Land War have been less studied than their male counterparts is that intense study of female activism reveals criticisms and shortcomings of the Land League itself, which was not the preferred narrative.[72] The men's leadership, without a doubt, was impactful, but women's contributions to the Land War offer new perspectives on this important portion of Irish history.

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[69] Danae O'Regan, "Anna & Fanny Parnell," *History Ireland* 7, no. 1 (1999): 39, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27724639.

[70] Daniel Crilly, "Irish Evictions." ([n.p.], 1887), 3 https://jstor.org/stable/10.2307/60216501.

[71] *Ibid.,* 4.

[72] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries,* 5.

From 1879 to 1882, the massive agrarian movement led by the Land League viewed land agitation as a stepping stone towards independence.[73] Demonstrating a link between the nationalist fight and poverty, the League inspired farmers to fight rack-rents charged by iron-handed landlords. Rent was often too high for tenants to be able to pay, which resulted in evictions that led them either to the streets or the workhouses, options perhaps equal in their unfavorability. The men in charge of this organization realized that as the Land War reached its height that it would only be a matter of time before they were imprisoned for their methods.[74] These methods included actions within Parliament, such as long speeches that shed light on the "central socioeconomic" land issue. However, they also openly incited civil disobedience and boycotted landlords who violated their code of conduct. Thus, on January 31, 1881, Irishmen of the Land League, fearful of their impending imprisonment, petitioned Irishwomen to take over the movement, requesting not only their participation but their leadership in this turbulent political movement.[75]

The Ladies Land League had come to life in the hands of determined women who shared many traits of their 1798 ancestors. Founder of the Land League Michael Davitt would later say of these women, "Everything in the way of defeating the ordinary law and asserting the unwritten law of the League . . . was more systematically carried out under the

[73] Janet K. Tebrake, "Irish Peasant Women in Revolt: The Land League Years," *Irish Historical Studies* 28, no. 109 (1992): 63, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30008005.

[74] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries,* 4.

[75] *Ibid.*

direction of the ladies' executive than by its predecessor."[76] He was full of enthusiasm for women to advocate in this realm because he saw what they were capable of and accepted their abilities as organizers and activists, but not all men shared this sentiment. Charles Stewart Parnell actually opposed the idea of the Ladies Land League himself, and this led to great conflict with his sister. Davitt, however, continued to view opposition to women in this form of activism as invalid, in part because those who opposed it offered no alternative.[77] Nonetheless, upon the genesis of the Ladies Land League, observable discrimination towards women in the nationalist movement began.

Future generations of Irish nationalist women like Maud Gonne would voice their dissatisfaction in regards to how women in nationalism were treated, and actively tried to change the minds and hearts of men who doubted them and their intentions.[78] When Gonne first attempted to join the Land League's predecessor, the Irish National League, (also founded by Charles Stewart Parnell) they informed her that women were not granted membership, but after she brought up the legitimacy of the Ladies Land League, they agreed to "find plenty of work for her." Gonne, still not satisfied, would reply, "I know women can do some things better than men, and men can do some things better than we can; but I don't like this exclusion of women from the National fight, and the fact they should have to work

[76] Michael Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland* (London and New York: Harper & Row, 1904), 310.

[77] Marie Hughes, "The Parnell Sisters," *Dublin Historical Record* 21, no. 1 (1966): 23, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30104287.

[78] Ward, *Maud Gonne,* 22.

through back-door influence if they want to get things done."[79] The influence of the Ladies Land League inspired many women to carry on the fight in aiding the poor (mostly evicted tenants) and advancing Irish nationalism.

Anna Parnell (1852-1911), who is frequently referenced as the sister of Charles Stewart Parnell, was placed at the head of the Ladies Land League by Irish Leaguers. Her intellectual and organizational ability helped the group take a prominent part in Irish political life, and alongside her sister, Fanny Parnell (1848-1852), the two became the faces of outspoken patriotic and nationalist women with concern for Ireland's most vulnerable—evicted people who plummeted into poverty as a result of a loss of living space and lack of money.[80] While Fanny took a more traditional and "acceptable" middle-class lady's approach to her activism, using mostly philanthropy and fundraising, Anna was less moderate and "would blaze a trail for those who were not prepared to accept boundaries between male and female modes of action."[81] Studying the Ladies Land League exemplifies how women translated their care for the oppressed into nationalist activism, and more importantly, set the precedent for politically active nationalist women in future generations, allowing for groups like the Daughters of Erin to later form at the dawn of the twentieth century.

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[79] MacBride et al., *The Autobiography of Maud Gonne*, 97.

[80] Dana Hearne, "Rewriting History: Anna Parnell's 'the Tale of a Great Sham'," *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 8, no. 2 (1983): 139, http://www.jstor.org/stable/45278168.

[81] O'Regan, "Anna & Fanny Parnell," 37.

Historians have explored how Anna Parnell's leadership and desire to keep the Land League honest caused her to be labelled as outrageous and disagreeable.[82] A woman leading an intense movement that supported and fundraised for evicted tenants was unusual, so she was met with controversy in multiple contexts. Parnell kept detailed and organized records of the families helped by these women, and was noted to show up to work daily at their designated office with gifts for younger members.[83] Scholars have also noted that the Ladies Land League was accused of being extravagant with their spending and quickly spent the funds that were provided. However, it is hard to distinguish just how fair or honest such claims are, because there are no documented details of the group's income.[84] It is known, however, that Anna Parnell grew to love this work and poured countless hours into this activism.

As a witness to the poverty of suffering evicted tenants and as someone who grew up hearing accounts of people suffering in the Great Famine, Parnell had full intentions to advocate for the poor and the oppressed with utmost integrity, even if it meant conflict with members of the Land League. In her book *Tale of a Great Sham*, she critiques male nationalist leadership, referring to their lack of action to organize rent-strikes as the "great sham." She notes that the men were especially vocal with their rhetoric but often failed to follow through. Parnell's outward criticisms were met first with coldness but later active hostility from the men in the Land League, as they were surprised to see her taking the

[82] Hearne, "Rewriting History: Anna Parnell's 'the Tale of a Great Sham'," 140.

[83] Hughes, "The Parnell Sisters," 24.

[84] Hughes, "The Parnell Sisters," 25.

movement so seriously, and not just functioning as a placeholder as women were expected to be.[85] Through Anna Parnell's actions in the Land League and various assessments of her work, one sees how women were inspired by the plight of Ireland's poor and continued to develop the nationalist conscience of Ireland, even in the midst of opposition from the British government and the men from their own nation. However, Michael Davitt continued to voice his pride and respect for the women of the Ladies Land League, praising their record-keeping skills, the money they raised for legal assistance for evicted tenants, and the organization of boys' clubs for the purpose of teaching Irish history to the youth.[86] Ultimately, however, most men were not prepared to treat the women in the movement as political equals.

The agrarian conflict of the latter half of the nineteenth century demonstrates how politically active women were often categorized as extremists and more dedicated than men in activism. Beginning in 1798, accounts of women who took part in the United Irishmen's uprising described them as "more vehement than men" and "fighting with fury" for the sake of Ireland. Similarly, one sees that Anna Parnell and the Ladies Land League were painted as being quite extreme themselves, and described as "more sincere than the men," even though most scholars who write about them conclude that they were simply acting with honesty, integrity, and earnestness.[87] Scholars should also debate the validity of such claims of extremism in a twenty-first century setting. Given the constraints on women of the nineteenth century and expectations of tamer behavior, it is reasonable to note that many of these

[85] T. W. Moody, "Anna Parnell and the Land League," *Hermathena*, no. 117 (1974): 13, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23040487.

[86] Hearne, "Rewriting History: Anna Parnell's 'the Tale of a Great Sham'," 42.

[87] Ward, *Maud Gonne*, 19.

"extreme" women may not be all that different from politically active men who share their ideas — they just seem more vehement than their male counterparts because they are expected to be quiet, delicate, and gentle "angels of the house." This is not to say that women were not sincere and devoted to Irish nationalism, but rather that their activism is not of an obnoxious or unusual nature. It is often inspired by altruistic concerns for the poor and vulnerable, and the Land War's end marked the beginning for a strong generation of women to continue the fight towards independence for Ireland and opposition to the British Empire.

By 1882 the rural violence perpetuated by the Land War reached all-time high levels and the British government began to take bigger steps to mitigate agitation.[88] Anna Parnell's leadership promoted expensive methods to fully unroot and oppose landlordism, and her brother dissolved the Land League entirely in 1882.[89] The explanation as to why was rooted in the complaint that they spent too much, and this was threatening the stability of the land movement overall, so he essentially froze the organization out of existence by denying them any more funds.[90] Margaret Ward finds men's inability to see women as legitimate political forces to be one of the primary reasons for the League's disbandment.[91] As a result of his actions, a great rift formed between Anna and Charles, and she never forgave him for not only humiliating her in this way but also robbing her of the work she so greatly enjoyed and

[88] O'Regan, "Anna & Fanny Parnell," 40.

[89] *Ibid.*

[90] Hughes, "The Parnell Sisters," 25.

[91] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries,* 33.

derived purpose from.[92] Women involved in the nationalist movement and the general land conflict would continue to cultivate their ideas, but Anna notably developed reclusive habits because her main medium for making friends and living out a great purpose had been slashed. The treatment of Anna Parnell speaks to only part of how women were discriminated against in the nationalist movement. Nevertheless, they persisted in their convictions. To echo the words of Maud Gonne, "surely Ireland needs all her children."[93] Irish nationalist women willingly continued to face such discrimination because they saw their country in need of help — and what consistently inspired them was the plight of Ireland's poor, whether they be in the form of evicted tenants, prisoners, or people suffering from generational poverty inflicted by the Great Famine, further evidencing the relevance and closeness of nationalism and poverty in Irish women's activism.

The Ladies Land League has a mixed legacy because of the intensity of its activism. Its existence ensured that politically active nationalist women became anathema to certain men, such as Charles Stewart Parnell, but the League also received praise for its organization, tenacity, and work with children, and future nationalist women's organizations would applaud its work.[94] It demonstrated that there was a general appetite for women to be drawn into nationalist politics, and the Daughters of Erin thought of the Ladies Land League as their direct forebearer.[95] Upon the disbandment of the Ladies Land League, women

[92] Hughes, "The Parnell Sisters," 25.

[93] MacBride et al., *The Autobiography of Maud Gonne*, 95.

[94] Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women,* 37.

[95] *Ibid.,* 100.

continued to stay active and even suggested establishing new leagues across Ireland to teach national literature and educate the next generation of young people about the nation's history, continuing the goals of the Ladies Land League. Ultimately, the ability of women to organize for the national cause waxed and waned until 1900, when the Daughters of Erin stepped in to formally fulfill the mission that many of these women originally sought to accomplish in the Land War.[96] However, the years between the end of the Land War and the genesis of the Daughters of Erin witnessed great strides for women in nationalism as well, and poverty continued to be a central issue for women pursuing the political realm.

[96] *Ibid.*

CHAPTER IV
POST LAND WAR

The late nineteenth century truly saw Irish nationalist women come to life, and they partially stood on the shoulders of the rise and fall of the Ladies Land League. This thesis has argued that much of their legacy rests on a desire to aid the poor and finds evidence that this spirit continues as history inches closer to the 1900 establishment of the Daughters of Erin. Two leading examples of these women, Maud Gonne and Constance Markievicz, helped define this era with their eloquence, earnestness, beauty, fearlessness, and dedication. They are both remembered and cherished for these traits. The women were two years apart in age and differed in subtle ways in terms of ideology, and obviously embodied a unique sense of individuality, but their commonalities in respects to their concerns for justice and the poor make for an additional compelling case of the historical episode that connects the themes of women, poverty, and nationalism.

Maud Gonne, a woman of reckless courage and ethereal beauty, was obsessed with the fight for Irish independence. Many writers have failed to put her persona into words and have reduced her to a hyperbole in attempting to capture her qualities as Ireland's fierce personification of romantic nationalism.[97] Her roots are neither humble nor Irish, but rather upper-class Victorian. She was born on December 21, 1866, Maud Gonne in Tongham, England to Captain Thomas Gonne and Edith Cook into a status of privilege. She developed a great closeness with her father, and because of his status as a soldier, Maud and her sister Kathleen spent much time in Ireland after moving there during their childhood. Because of

[97] Ward, *Maud Gonne,* 1.

this move, the girls had exposure to the "poor Irish." Her interactions with this group, she claims, were defined by warmth and hospitality, which deeply contrasted with her regular evenings in a stiff aristocratic setting with her great-aunt and other family members and friends.[98]

Ultimately, the answer of why Maud Gonne converted from an aristocratic daughter of a colonel to the personification of Irish nationalism lies in the plight of evicted people in the ongoing land conflict. Maud often recalled a conversation she listened in on at a ball hosted by a wealthy landowner and his wife. During dinner, the landowner exclaimed, "that damned Land League is ruining the country," followed by a rather horrific description of a situation involving a family evicted over their support of the Land League.[99] To Maud's shock and horror, her host held no sympathy for this family and even said they should be left to die for their support of the Land League and general agrarian conflict, which apparently caused him hardship and frustration in his position as a landlord. Maud later refers to this as an event that opened up her eyes to the tragic reality of many Irish people who were not extended the same privileges as she, and in her future activism would recall this memory that served as the reason for her breaking family traditions of aristocracy and privilege.[100] She herself emphasizes how the suffering evicted tenants in Ireland experienced misery because "Ireland was not free, because we had no land and the people no means of living," and this idea fueled her rich life of activism throughout the end of the nineteenth century and into the

[98] *Ibid.,* 6.

[99] *Ibid.,* 11.

[100] MacBride et al., *The Autobiography of Maud Gonne,* 97.

twentieth century after the establishment of the Daughters of Erin.[101] Maud would also continue to invoke the poverty of people in Ireland's past, and this was echoed in her scathing critiques of her adversary Queen Victoria (whom she called the Famine Queen). In a speech to garner support for the nationalist cause in the United States, Maud Gonne sent chills down the spine of her audience when she stated, "To Ireland I say that freedom is never won without the sacrifice of blood. Our chance is coming. The end of the British empire is at hand. Your motherland calls you. She has been the land of sorrow long enough."[102] Her rhetoric in this speech matches up with the strong assessment of nationalism described by scholars cited earlier in this thesis — it is aggressive because it calls for blood sacrifices and glorifies Ireland strongly by referring to it as the "motherland." Finally, Irish plight is demonstrated in this speech in her reference to Ireland as the "land of sorrow."

Throughout the rest of Maud's extensive political life, the idea of Ireland being a "land of sorrow," burdened by religious oppression, famine, and brutality of landlords, inspired much of her activism. Maud was defined by her sense of justice to not only advance her nation, but also the rights of its most poor and vulnerable inhabitants. She would also fight for the women's place in the heart of Irish nationalism, and though she was often met with suspicions and concerns from many male counterparts, her legacy is one of a woman promised in ancient Celtic legend — a woman who would fight for her nation with great integrity. Maud Gonne's life and legacy might be the strongest argument in identifying a

[101] *Ibid,* 116.

[102] Quoted in Ward, *Maud Gonne,* 60.

strong connection between the themes of poverty, nationalism, and women's activism in Ireland.

Maud Gonne was by no means the only woman to embody nationalist characteristics and a desire for Irish independence. Perhaps the woman most famous for her contributions to nationalism and her tenderness for the poor working-class people of Ireland was Constance Markievicz, a combatant in the 1916 Easter Rising and the first woman to be elected to Parliament. She too was born in England into a rich and powerful family and was the daughter of a benevolent landlord, Sir Henry Gore-Booth. Like Maud Gonne, she rejected the expectations of the Anglo-Irish elite, first by studying art in Paris and adopting a semi-bohemian lifestyle, and then by embracing Irish feminist and nationalist causes.[103] Though she was apolitical in her early years and spent an enjoyable childhood in her family home in Sligo, known as Lissadell, she demonstrated her impulse to care for the underdog at an early age. Constance was surrounded by politics in her estate, (despite a general sentiment perpetuated by her father to avoid talking about such matters) and while her peers spent time discussing Home Rule bills of the 1890s, she found herself concerned for the wellbeing of the servants who waited on them.[104] Though such a gesture may be small, it is indicative of what her future life would look like as an activist for Ireland's poor. Most of her direct involvement in Irish nationalism took place after 1900 (she attended her first Daughters of Erin meeting in 1908). However, the roots for her future socialism and constant desire to earn

[103] Jane S. Gabin and Anne Haverty, "Rebel with a Cause," *The Women's Review of Books* 6, no. 12 (1989): 31, https://doi.org/10.2307/4020597.

[104] Haverty, *Constance Markievicz,* 32.

the right to be associated with the working class were set before her active nationalist tendencies began.

When Ireland faced famine again (luckily smaller in scale to the Great Famine) in the 1870s due to crop failures, many of Sir Henry Booth's tenants faced starvation, but they were met with benevolence as the family at Lissadell arranged for food distribution.[105] In this time the Gore-Booth family witnessed the extreme poverty of the tenants, and Constance carried this memory into her future as a nationalist and social justice activist. In addition to witnessing the plight of tenants in her youth, the Gore-Booth family was also acquainted with the writer William Butler Yeats. By exposing Constance and her sister to folklore, tales of the occult, and various different forms of Irish poetry, Yeats served as a nationalist influence on the girls.[106] Yeats himself was also romantically obsessed with Maud Gonne and viewed Constance and Eva as somewhat similar to his beloved, which could explain part of why he enjoyed spending time at Lissadell. The impact of Yeats, alongside the reverence for past nationalist figures that Constance observed during her time in Ireland, certainly helped form the woman she would become. In her later years, she joined James Connolly's Irish Citizen Army and viewed socialism in general to be an antidote to the ghastly poverty faced in urban and rural areas. Nationalism could help mitigate the problems of unemployment, employee exhaustion, and wages stuck at starvation levels, but not solve them entirely in her view.[107] It is evident that her upbringing helped form such views.

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[105] Haverty, *Constance Markievicz,* 15.

[106] *Ibid.*, 39.

[107] *Ibid.*, 94.

Though both Gonne and Markievicz were born in the late nineteenth century and the majority of their memorable activism took place after 1900, they were both products of Ireland's long and turbulent nineteenth century. Both the women converted to Roman Catholicism, in part due to their own spiritual convictions. However, it is also worth considering the intently cultural nature of Catholicism in Ireland. Though many Irish nationalists were Protestant, it came to be associated with "coercion and privilege," while Catholicism maintained a status of pride and independence for the working class (nearly 95 percent of landlords were Protestant in Ireland).[108] In a chapter titled "The Inevitability of the Church," Maud Gonne's autobiography describes how a priest she met with asked her, "why are you not a Catholic like your Nation?"[109] She also describes how many people who looked up to her in Ireland offered up their prayers on the rosary for her conversion, and suggests that the same religion Daniel O'Connell fought so hard for in the debate around Catholic Emancipation was actually a spiritual necessity to Ireland's nationalist movement. "I believe every political movement on earth has its counterpart in the spiritual world and the battles we fight here have perhaps been already fought out on another plane and great leaders draw their often unexplained great power from this. I cannot conceive a material movement which has not had a spiritual basis."[110] Maud viewed her own childhood faith, that of the Church of England, as "the Church of the evictors, of the pious people who destroy houses and leave

[108] Haverty, *Constance Markievicz,* 6.

[109] MacBride et al., *The Autobiography of Maud Gonne,* 330.

[110] *Ibid.,* 336.

children to die…"[111] Maud's views here on the spiritual necessity of Catholicism to help the poor and advancing nationalism indeed make it seem like her conversion was inevitable. Her conversion itself was in great earnest, but to ignore the political implications of Catholicism and class distinctions in Ireland would be to ignore something of too much importance. Acknowledging it, however, advances the notion that poverty, nationalism, and women's activism in Ireland all worked closely together to create a fascinating political and cultural dynamic. Markievicz's conversion underscores the understanding that religion was often a reflection of political identity. After spending time in prison after the Easter Rising of 1916, she took instruction from a Catholic chaplain and also joined the Church, allowing Irish nationalism to consume not only her religious life, but her social and cultural identity as well.[112]

Gonne and Markievicz benefitted from Daniel O'Connell's activism to normalize Catholicism in Ireland, but also drew motivation and inspiration from the work of the United Irishmen in the 1798 rebellion, demonstrating the historical significance of the event. Other women in nationalism sought to commemorate this uprising as well. The *Shan Van Vocht* ("poor old woman") was established in 1896 by Alice Milligan (1865-1953) and Anna Johnston (1864-1902) in Belfast. It featured varying amounts of literature, poetry, historical articles, and political commentary that included works of Maud Gonne and James Connolly, who would greatly influence Markievicz in her later nationalist endeavors.[113] The *Shan Van*

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[111] *Ibid.*, 332.

[112] Haverty, *Constance Markievicz,* 170.

[113] Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries,* 45.

Vocht was also seen as a staple in providing content that fueled the Irish Revival, a "cultural and aesthetic watershed in Irish history."[114] Milligan and Johnston made it clear that they did not personally endorse the socialist views that were occasionally present in their magazine, but allowed for a wide variety of ideas pertaining to Irish nationalism to be published. These varying viewpoints demonstrate the multidimensional nature of Irish nationalism and validate Benedict Anderson's assessment of nationalism; these views demonstrate that the Irish nation was not as monolithic as some nationalists may have hoped. They did share a common goal of Irish sovereignty though, and the *Shan Van Vocht* played a significant role in advancing that idea. It operated as a "literary factor in the National cause," and helped commemorate the centenary of the 1798 rebellion of the United Irishmen.[115] The magazine's editors viewed the United Irishmen as an inspiration to modern nationalists. In an issue from May of 1898, it published the following:

> This centenary of '98 is of momentous importance to Ireland. The United Irishmen, and their great and heroic leader, Wolfe Tone, brought Ireland nearer to Freedom than she has ever been since; therefore, it is the duty of all those who believe in the cause of Liberty and the right of Ireland to nationhood to show every honour and reverence for those men who, a hundred years ago, sacrificed their lives for Freedom's sake.[116]

This diction shows great reverence for the centenary celebration and is clearly laced with nationalist influence. The *Shan Van Vocht* regularly published content that complemented

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[114] Catherine Morris, "Becoming Irish? Alice Milligan and the Revival," *Irish University Review* 33, no. 1 (2003): 79, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25517215.

[115] Virginia Crossman, "*The Shan Van Vocht:* Women, Republicanism, and the Commemoration of the 1798 Rebellion," Eighteenth-Century Life (Duke University Press, November 1, 1998), 1, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/10463/summary.

[116] "Remember '98!," *Shan Van Vocht*, May 1898, 80.

nationalist ideas and revered nationalist history, and women were the central force that kept the magazine publishing such sentiments. Literature and education were seen as elements appropriate for the realm of women, so it was perceived to be proper and acceptable for them to contribute to the nationalist cause through this form of work, as they could combine this work with their duties at home.[117] However, the *Shan Van Vocht* as a whole inspired people of all walks of life to contribute to the Irish nationalist cause. In the same 1898 issue, they encourage their readers to address poverty and help the suffering:

> Our appeal should be rather to every Irish Nationalist in the world over to give his share, be it little or much, for the present necessity; moreover, we should insist that action must be taken to prevent the recurrence of such calamity. Thousands of pounds are flowing daily out of Ireland which could be kept at home, if we would but take time to consider whether in each purchase we could benefit an Irish rather than a foreign producer. We would, above all, urge our readers who have money and leisure to act on Miss Maude Gonne's advice and go to the West, if only for a few days, to realise the terrible condition and sufferings of the people. They will be in a position to do more good when they understand the character of the people with whom they have to deal, and the possibility there is of developing industries in their midst; and if you hesitate to take such risks, say not another word about English tyranny as the cause of Irish poverty. Ireland's destinies are yours to decide, and if you fail in your filial duty, the fault in God's sight is your own.[118]

What is especially fascinating about this article from this female-edited magazine is the obvious acknowledgement that England is the cause of Ireland's impoverished state. However, they called upon all nationalists worldwide to address this through their actions and not to accept this as their reality. They hoped to inspire their readers to take action and address the burdens imposed upon the Irish by the English, and idolized figures like Maud

[117] Crossman, "The Shan Van Vocht: Women, Republicanism, and the Commemoration of the 1798 Rebellion," 3.

[118] "The Famine and the Fever," *Shan Van Vocht*, May 1898, 95, UCD Digital Library, https://doi.org/10.7925/drs1.ucdlib_43145.

Gonne who helped lead the movement. Ireland's religious identity is shown through this as well, as they invoke God and his judgement at the end, but this ultimately reflects that nationalism is multidimensional and not exclusively Catholic, because Milligan identified as Protestant and Johnston as Catholic. However, they both identified with an aspiration of creating a nonsectarian union for people who believed in freedom for the Irish.[119] They believed in a brand of nationalism that promoted unity and prioritized helping Ireland's impoverished over differences of gender, political ideology, or religion.

Ultimately, the earnestness of Maud Gonne, Constance Markievicz, and the women of the *Shan Van Vocht* share a common denominator: addressing the plight of the Irish people resulting from perceived English tyranny. While the legacies of each of these women speak to different aspects of Irish identity, including religion and the fight for women's place in politics, the center of every conversation is helping heal the wounds of the urban and rural poor, whether it be through aiding evicted tenants, avenging the memory of those who died in the Great Famine, or raising money for nationalist causes that would free Ireland from British rule and help her regulate herself and her people as an independent nation. In the years after the Land War, agrarian conflict certainly did not come to an end, and themes of poverty and plight continued to surface. Tragic as they may be, they continued to light the fire of women's activism throughout Ireland's nineteenth century, right up until the very end. The establishment of the Daughters of Erin in 1900 by Maud Gonne represented a fresh and optimistic start for Irish women — and the early twentieth century in Ireland certainly provided plenty of intense opportunities for them to embrace the national cause. Ireland did

[119] Crossman, "The Shan Van Vocht: Women, Republicanism, and the Commemoration of the 1798 Rebellion," 2.

not achieve status as a republic until 1949, and Northern Ireland to this day remains part of the United Kingdom, though the fight of these women inspired by their heart for justice and the poor helped Ireland reach the partial unity and independence that it knows today.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS

Ireland's nineteenth century, in general terms, was a century of many burdens and much political turbulence, echoing Maud Gonne's assessment of Ireland being the "land of sorrow." Starting in 1798, it became evident that women would play a role in advancing republican and nationalist causes because of their various contributions to the rebellion and the United Irishmen's movement. This thesis has sought to explore how those roles developed through time, noting that poverty and plight were central to the growth and expansion of these roles. In the years following the Act of Union in the early 1800s, women participated in the fight for the rights of Catholics alongside Daniel O'Connell. Women of Ireland's nineteenth century worked within constrained agency due to rigid expectations for how a proper woman should act, but found ways to engage in the political realm within these limitations. Additionally, some women found themselves breaking more delicate expectations of their sex (such as the women who assumed aggressive combat roles in 1798) but remained restricted in organized politics. By giving women a seat at the table in the Precursor Society, O'Connell opened up the doors for women to engage with politics in Ireland more formally. The early nineteenth century set the foundation for female engagement in nationalist politics, and their inclinations to help the poor and the oppressed in Ireland was consistently at the heart of their activism.

Ireland's mighty agricultural tragedy, the Great Famine, changed the cultural dynamics of the nation which helped mold the nationalist cause. The famine caused massive amounts of poverty, starvation, and illness, and to accommodate these new challenges, women expanded their roles as mothers and caretakers. Desperation to feed themselves and

their families (often in the context of the death of a husband) enabled them to assume roles typically reserved for men, such as procuring food and working on public works projects. Women experienced the ramifications of the famine in unique ways because of their responsibilities as mothers and caretakers of their children, and their hardships were well documented. Future generations of nationalist women used this documentation to inspire their peers to join the nationalist cause. The overall suffering throughout the famine years contributed to growing sentiments of disdain for Britain's power over Ireland and inspired continued nationalist tendencies for men and women alike.

This thesis has also explored the ramifications of female engagement in the Land War and how the Ladies Land League served as a forebear to the Daughters of Erin. The Land War made poverty and plight a central motivating factor to engage in various forms of activism that demonstrates a strong link between poverty, nationalism, and Irish women. In addition to serving as the direct response to Ireland's central socioeconomic issue of oppressive landlord and tenant relationships, the Land War and the Ladies Land League inspired future nationalist women to great extents. Maud Gonne herself refers to evictions and land conflict as the catalyst that sparked her conversion from an aristocrat to a dedicated Irish nationalist. Additionally, Constance Markievicz's upbringing in a landowning family helped instill a sense of justice in her heart for the poor and oppressed that would later define her legacy as both a socialist and a nationalist. The 1798 rebellion, Catholic Emancipation, the Great Famine, and the Land War all served as events that brought women closer towards the establishment of a formal nationalist organization of their own, one that Maud Gonne

describes as a delight, because it gave her the company of like-minded women who shared a commitment to Ireland, as well as friendship that would provide her with joyful memories.[120]

Women's encounters with poverty ultimately helped them become activists that significantly helped the Irish nationalist women. Their dedication to their country and its people was outstanding and impressive — and deserving of intense study and scholarship. This thesis has aspired to explore the concept of poverty as a means of inspiring women who craved justice for the Irish people. Their impact is not limited to the nineteenth century, and in the years after 1900, the Daughters of Erin would make massive contributions to Ireland's greater pursuit of independence by merging into a paramilitary organization called *Cumann na mBan.* Women like Markievicz would fight bravely alongside the men in the Irish nationalist movement, sharing the same goal of Irish independence and sovereignty. It is extremely fascinating to observe how Irish poverty inspired such devotion to nationalism for these women.

An interesting and compelling final example of overlap between women's activism, nationalism, and poverty is the death of Constance Markievicz. In nearly sixty years of life, Markievicz had transitioned out of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy and into nationalism, socialism, and Roman Catholicism. She took on a militant role as a member of *Cumann na mBan* in the Easter Rising and served time in prison for her revolutionary activities. Markievicz also became the first woman elected into the Westminster Parliament, but instead of taking her seat, served in the revolutionary government of Ireland known as the First Dáil. She constantly aspired to help Ireland's poor, and what said the most about her life, in many

[120] Ward, *Maud Gonne*, 67.

ways, was her death. In July of 1927, she fell ill and was brought to Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital to be treated for appendicitis.[121] While initial operations looked promising, she ultimately developed a graver illness. As she slowly succumbed to her illness, groups of Dublin's poor whose love she had won over would gather around the hospital to pray for her and sing her praises.[122] Her death was met with great sadness by the people she loved most — those suffering from poverty and plight. Constance Markievicz was celebrated as one of Ireland's greatest champions in her funeral, and was referred to as the "lover of the poor" in her eulogy.[123]

The fact that a woman born into wealth and privilege could become a woman who died in a public ward alongside Ireland's poor is telling of the power of poverty in the political realm. Irish women demonstrated time and time again throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that the suffering of the poor meant something to them, something meaningful enough to consume their politics, lifestyle, religion, and culture. Their stories of breaking the constraints placed on women to become national activists with great devotion and vehemence is endlessly fascinating. It adds breadth and depth to narratives of Irish nationalism typically dominated by the stories and legacies of men. Ultimately, Irish nationalist women observed poverty, and realized that they embodied a spirit of justice that they allowed to permeate not just their politics, but their lives.

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[121] Haverty, *Constance Markievicz,* 228.

[122] *Ibid.,* 229.

[123] *Ibid.*

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BIOGRAPHY

Christine Anita Foley was born in Buffalo, New York and grew up in Coppell, Texas. She graduated from Angelo State University in May of 2021 with a Bachelor of Arts in history with Highest University Honors. In her time at Angelo State, Christine served as president of Phi Alpha Theta History Honor Society and a mentor in the Honors Program. She also played for Angelo State's rugby team for two years and led the women's ministry team at the Catholic Newman Center.